

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9593
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL UDORN
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4331

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, EAIR, LA, TH, VN
SUBJECT: THAI-LAO AVIATION DISCUSSIONS

REF: (A) VIENTIANE 348 (B) BANGKOK 4147

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE CONTAINS OBSERVATIONS ON THE PENDING
THAI-LAO AVIATION AGREEMENT AND ON OTHER ASPECTS OF RECENT
DISCUSSIONS CONDUCTED IN VIENTIANE. THAI AUTHORITIES APPEAR
SATISFIED WITH PROGRESS MADE, ALTHOUGH RESULTS REMAIN FRAGILE.
END SUMMARY.

1. COMMENTS IN BANGKOK SUPPORT INFORMATION CONTAINED REF A
CONCERNING LAST WEEK'S AVIATION DISCUSSIONS IN VIENTIANE BE-
TWEEN THAI AND LAO OFFICIALS. KNOWLEDGEABLE MFA OFFICIAL
CONFIRMED TO EMBOFFS FEB 24 THAT THAI DELEGATION USED AS ITS
NEGOTIATING PLOY AGREEMENT TO PERMIT LAO AVIATION TO FLY INTO
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BANGKOK IN EXCHANGE FOR MOVEMENT ON THAILAND'S REQUEST
TO OVERFLY LAOS (AS PREDICTED). HE ADDED THAT PLAN
SUCCEEDED. IATA REPRESENTATIVE OBSERVED THAT AGREEMENT'S
PROVISION FOR FOUR FLIGHTS PER WEEK ON PART OF EACH AIRLINE
TO CAPITAL CITY OF THE OTHER COUNTRY IS A MAXIMAL FIGURE,
RATHER THAN THE ACTUAL NUMBER WHICH WILL BE FLOWN.

2. ON OVERFLIGHTS, FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIR PACHARIYANGKUN TOLD PRESS FEB 23 THAT, WHILE LAO AGREED TO THEM IN PRINCIPLE, FURTHER DISCUSSION ON DETAILS, "INCLUDING THE NAVIGATION CHART", IS REQUIRED. EMBASSY HAS NOT LEARNED WHETHER AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON QUESTION OF LAO CHARGES FOR OVERFLIGHTS.

3. WITH RESPECT TO TICKET SALES, UPPADIT SAID THAT THAI AIRWAYS CORPORATION (TAC) WILL BE PERMITTED TO SET UP AN OFFICE IN VIENTIANE "TO GIVE ADVICE ON THE SALE OF TICKETS" BUT CANNOT SELL THEM. HE ADDED THAT TAC IS SATISFIED THAT FOREIGN EXCHANGE FROM THE SALE OF TICKETS (IN DOLLARS) CAN BE REPATRIATED. AN MFA OFFICIAL OBSERVED THAT EACH COMPANY WILL BE PERMITTED TO SELL TICKETS GOOD ONLY TO THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE OTHER COUNTRY RATHER THAN TO ONWARD DESTINATIONS. THUS, THERE IS NO DANGER OF ONE AIRLINE BEING OUT OF POCKET FOR A CONSIDERABLE SUM OF MONEY, SHOULD THE OTHER GOVERNMENT SUDDENLY REFUSE TO TURN OVER PROCEEDS OF TICKET SALES.

4. MFA SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT EACH GOVERNMENT MUST NOW PASS ON THE AGREEMENT, AFTER WHICH AIRLINE OFFICIALS WILL HAVE TO MEET ONCE AGAIN TO MAKE FINAL DECISIONS ON ITS IMPLEMENTATION. HE TOOK A CAUTIOUS, WAIT-AND-SEE STANCE AS TO PROSPECTS OF THE AGREEMENT SURVIVING, NOTING THAT A RANDOM BORDER INCIDENT COULD BE SUFFICIENT TO JEOPARDIZE IT.

5. CONFIRMING INFO IN REF A, SAME OFFICIAL AGREED THAT PRO-CONFIDENTIAL

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GRESS WAS MADE IN POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS DURING THE VIENTIANE VISIT, WHICH ACCOUNTED FOR REASON MFA UNDERSECRETARY WONG PHONNIKON HEADED DELEGATION IN THE FIRST PLACE, BUT SOURCE DECLINED TO PROVIDE ANY DETAILS. HE SAID RTG IS HOPEFUL THAT AVIATION AGREEMENT IN ITSELF WILL BE SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT STEP IN IMPROVING THAI-LAO RELATIONS.

6. UPPADIT INFORMED PRESS FEB 23 THAT WONG TOLD PDRL AUTHORITIES THAT MISUNDERSTANDING HAD CAUSED SOME OF THE STRAINS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER. UPPADIT SAID DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS WAS FRANK, THE LAO ASSURING WONG THAT THEY DESIRE COOPERATION WITH THAILAND. HE NOTED THAT BOTH SIDES AGREED THAT SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES SHOULD MEET, UPPADIT ADDING THAT HE HOPED MEETING COULD TAKE PLACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

7. AS FOR VIET-NAM, OUR MFA CONTACT SAID THAT CURRENT PLANNING IS FOR THAI DELEGATION TO HANOI (REF B) TO CONSIST OF TECHNICAL LEVEL AVIATION OFFICIALS, ALTHOUGH THAT IS

SUBJECT TO CHANGE. WHEN (AND IF) VISIT WILL TAKE PLACE IS UP TO THE VIETNAMESE. HE NOTED THAT SUGGESTION THAT VIETNAMESE VISIT BANGKOK TO INSPECT GVN EMBASSY SEEMS TO BE ON ICE AT THE MOMENT.

8. COMMENT: FEELING IN BANGKOK IS THAT LAST WEEK'S THAI-LAO TALKS WENT WELL. WHETHER FORWARD MOVEMENT ON AVIATION OR OTHER QUESTIONS WILL CONTINUE IS ANYONE'S GUESS ALTHOUGH, FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, IT SEEMS TO US THAT BOTH COUNTRIES MAY NOW DESIRE RESUMPTION OF AIR CONNECTION SUFFICIENTLY TO MAKE THE AGREEMENT WORK. PERHAPS A SIGN THAT RELATIONS CONTINUE IN FRIENDLIER PHASE ON AT LEAST PUBLIC LEVEL IS REFLECTED BY MEETING IN NON KHAI PROVINCE FEB 24 BETWEEN LAO OFFICIALS CONNECTED WITH NAM NGUM DAM AND THAI ELECTRICITY OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS CONTINUED PROVISION OF ELECTRICITY FROM THE DAM ACROSS THE MEKONG RIVER TO NORTH-EASTERN THAILAND.
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